

# A Panegyric on the Most Eminent Intellectual

## Philosophers of Antiquity

*Thomas Taylor*

In just proportion to the solar ray,  
Tho' truth eternal gives the mental day,  
Yet of our race most ne'er behold its light,  
Fast bound in Matter's cave involv'd in night;  
And but a few emerging from her den,  
Its brightest splendor can distinctly ken.  
This noble few in Greece of old were found,  
Whose names mankind with just applause resound.  
See! like some god descended from the skies,  
Pythag'ras, stands the foremost of the wise;  
Celestial beauties in his person shine,  
His manners modest, and his life divine.  
See! like some oracle, by Heav'n inspir'd,  
His breast with more than mortal wisdom fir'd,  
While to his harp he sings his former fate,  
The soul's transitions, and eternal state.  
He far discovered in the realms of mind,  
And soar'd from sense with vigor unconfin'd.  
See! Heraclitus quit his rightful throne,  
The various follies of mankind to moan;  
Mark! how he scorns the multitude impure,  
And truths sublime describes in words obscure;  
Attentive listen to his fav'rite theme,  
That all things flow like some perpetual stream;  
And ever-varying without check or stay,  
Rise to new life, or gradually decay.  
He saw the depths of Matter's dark domain,  
Stormy and whirling, like the raging main;  
Yet well the realms of intellect he knew,  
Where all is lovely, permanent and true;  
And certain of the soul's immortal frame,  
Obscurely told her lapse, and whence she came.  
Next view Parmenides, by heav'n inspir'd,  
And from th'ignoble multitude retir'd;  
Divinely meditate, and sing alone,  
In venerable verse the mystic one.  
Indignant from the realms of sense he flew,  
Corporeal forms receding from his view,  
Till leaving Matter's regions far behind,  
His piercing sight discern'd the world of mind.  
See! great Empedocles with rapture cry,  
"Farewell, a god immortal cannot die."  
In verse divine, he sung the wretched fate  
Of souls imprison'd in this mortal state;  
And man he call'd, (immers'd in Matter's night)  
"Heaven's exile, straying from his orb of light."  
Next mighty Socrates demands my lays,

Whose life and doctrines claim unbounded praise.  
 He to the theory of the realms of mind,  
 All his researches and his views confin'd;  
 And in the world's artificer divine  
 Saw the fair series of ideas shine  
 In depths immense of all-prolific light,  
 Forever vig'rous and forever bright.  
 See! Plato next in rank of wisdom stand,  
 Whose godlike works unbounded praise demand;  
 Who rose sublime to Truth's immortal plain,  
 And scorn'd dull Body, and her dark domain.  
 To good itself he soar'd with eager flight,  
 Till boundless beauty met his piercing sight.  
 See him with elegance sublime, unfold  
 Whate'er was known to men divine of old;  
 Yet but a few the secret sense can find,  
 And wond'rous depth of his capacious mind.  
 Next Aristotle claims our just applause,  
 Who thought itself confin'd by logic laws;  
 By gradual steps who teaches how to soar,  
 And the bright world of intellect explore.  
 Whose piercing genius with Lyncean view,  
 Look'd all the ample realms of Science thro',  
 Saw to what dazzling summits<sup>1</sup> they extend,  
 And what the darksome barrier<sup>2</sup> where they end.  
 To these philosophers succeed a race  
 Of glorious souls adorn'd with ev'ry grace;  
 All men divine, of ancient Wisdom's train,  
 And justly call'd by some a golden chain.  
 See! as the leader of the noble band,  
 The greatly-wise and good Plotinus stand.  
 Genius sublime! whilst bound in mortal ties,  
 Thy soul had frequent commerce with the skies;  
 And oft you loosen'd the lethargic folds  
 By which th' indignant mind dark matter holds.  
 What depth of thought, what energy is thine!  
 What rays of intellect in ev'ry line!  
 The more we fathom thy exalted mind,  
 A stronger light, a greater depth we find.  
 Thee too! blest Porphyry! my muse shall sing,  
 Since from the great Plotinus' school you spring;  
 What holy thoughts thy sacred books contain!  
 What stores of wisdom from thy works we gain!  
 Urg'd on by thee, we learn from sense to rise,  
 To break its fetters, and its charms despise.  
 Nor shall my muse the just applause decline,  
 Due to Iamblichus, surnam'd divine;

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<sup>1</sup> viz. The divine causes and principles of things which Aristotle calls "things naturally the most bright and manifest to all." And Theophrastus, in the fragment of his *Metaphysics*, calls them summits.

<sup>2</sup> viz. Matter.

Who pierc'd the veil which hid in dark disguise  
 Wisdom's deep mysteries from mortal eyes.  
 Whose godlike soul an ample mirror seems,  
 Strongly reflecting mind's unclouded beams;  
 Or like some sphere capacious, polish'd bright,  
 Throughout diaphanous and full of light.  
 Great Syrianus next, O muse, resound,  
 For depth and subtilty of thought renown'd.  
 Genius acute! th'exalted task was thine  
 The concord to display of men divine.  
 And what in fable was by them conceal'd,  
 Thy piercing mind perspicuously reveal'd.  
 But greatly eminent above the rest,  
 Proclus, the Coryphæus, stands confest.

The probable dates philosophers of the above panegyric

BCE

580-500 Pythagoras  
 535-475 Heraclitus  
 515-440 Parmenides  
 490-430 Empedocles  
 469-399 Socrates  
 428-348 Plato  
 384-322 Aristotle

C..E

204-270 Plotinus  
 234-305 Porphyry  
 245-325 Iamblichus  
 370-445? Syrianus  
 412-485 Proclus

Hail, might genius! of the human race,  
 Alike the guide, the glory, and the grace:  
 Whose volumes, full of genuine science shine  
 With thoughts magnificent, and truths divine.  
 Whose periods, too, redundant roll along,  
 Like some clear stream, majestically strong.  
 While genius lives, thy num'rous works shall last,  
 Alike the future wonder as the past.  
 The great Ammonius and Damascius claim  
 Our rev'rence next, as men of mighty name;  
 While yet Philosophy could boast a train  
 Of souls ally'd to Homer's golden chain.  
 The former for unfolding truth renown'd,  
 The latter for his searching mind profound.  
 Priscian and fam'd Olympiodorus stand  
 The next in order, and our praise demand,  
 And with th'acute Simplicius close the band.  
 Heroes, all hail! who left your native skies,  
 From Lethe's realms t'instruct us how to rise,  
 And thus once more our kindred stars regain,  
 And ancient seats in Truth's immortal plain,  
 From whence we wand'ring fell, thro' mad desire  
 Of Matter's regions, and allotments dire.  
 Let Folly proudly boast her tyrant reign,  
 Her num'rous vot'ries, and her wide domain;  
 Your wisdom scorn, and with barbaric hand  
 Spread futile theories thro' a venal land.  
 By you inspir'd, the glorious task be mine  
 To soar from sensibles to forms divine;  
 From Phantasy, the souls Calypso, free,  
 To sail secure on life's tempestuous sea,  
 Led by your doctrines, like the Pleiads' light,  
 With guiding radiance streaming thro' the night;  
 From mighty Neptune's overwhelming ire,  
 Back to the palace of my lawful sire.